

PURUṢĀRTHA ACCORDING TO
VĀLMĪKI RĀMĀYAṆA

Introduction

According to Śrī Aurobindo, three dominant qualities have shaped the evolution of Indian history and civilization. They are: i) India's stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginably prolific creativeness; ii) spirituality which is the master-key of the Indian mind; and iii) the strong intellectuality, at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail¹. We can say that the spirituality, vitality and intellectuality that are characteristic of Indian civilization stem from the idea of *dharma* in all its varied aspects. Under the concept of *dharma* the Hindu brings the forms and activities which shape and sustain human life. The principle of *dharma* recognizes spiritual realities, not cut off from life but integrating wealth (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*). *Dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* go together. It is *dharma* which gives unity to the diversity of human aspirations and values. *Dharma* is a comprehensive concept of rights and duties of individuals in a society and as such is the mirror of all moral action.

It is the purpose of this paper to outline the doctrine of the three ends of human life and explain the relation between them in the light

1. The Renaissance of India, in *Arya*, August-November, 1918, pp. 7-29.

of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* which is normally assigned to the period of around 400 B.C. Scholars generally agree that only in the first and in the last books of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which contain later additions, Rāma appears as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, and that too only as a partial one. He came to be accepted only later on as a full *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. But in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (14th cent. A.D.) and the *Rāmacaritmānasa* of Tulsī Dās (15th cent. A.D.) Rāma is fully deified and identified with the Supreme God.

1. The general notion of 'Puruṣārtha'

A human being orders his activity around a group of three categories (*trivarga*) which are the purposes of man (*Puruṣārtha*) par excellence. The mention of this doctrine reappears from the *Mahābhāṣya* onwards. *Dharma* includes all that is good (on the moral plane), *artha* that which is useful (on the social plane), *kāma* that which is agreeable (on the sensorial sphere). Tradition holds that this teaching has been imparted by Brahmā to the other gods at the end of the golden age under the form of an immense work which Śiva had resumed in a series of treatises (*Śāstras*). Their entire corpus forms the tradition (*smṛti*) on which is based all human activity. Through religious vision one has made the *trivarga* into *caturvarga*, adding the fourth one; namely, *mokṣa* (deliverance). The *Arthapañcaka* adds a fifth one by dividing the *mokṣa* in two: happiness of the isolated self and the felicity of the self united with Bhagavant.

The hierarchy of the *trivarga* is disputed. In principle *artha* prevails over *kāma* which is founded on it, and these two are considered inferior to *dharma* on which they are based. While materialists and hedonists consider *kāma* as the source of the other two values, and materialists consider *artha* as the source of the other two values, many hold that it is necessary to cultivate all the three equally; others establish a succession: *artha* is valid for infancy; *kāma* for the youth and *dharma* for the mature man; adding *mokṣa* for the old people².

2. L. RENOU, *L'Inde Classique*, Vol. I, Paris, 1954, par. 1150; Cfr. P.V. KANE, *History of Dharmaśāstra* Vol. II, Poona, 1930-62, pp. 8-9.

More precisely, *dharma* is defined as right conduct, *artha* as economic interests or wealth, *kāma* as the satisfaction of sexual, emotional and artistic life, and *mokṣa* as liberation of the spirit. The last is said to be the supreme goal of human life to be attained by adepts only after long and strenuous spiritual effort.

«The exertions of the wise are always associated with virtue, profit, and desire. If indeed all these three cannot be attained, men follow at least virtue and profit. If again these three are pursued separately, it is seen that they that have their hearts under control choose virtue; they that are neither good nor bad but occupy a middle station, choose profit, which is always the subject of dispute; while they that are fools choose the gratification of desire. The fool that from temptation giveth up virtue pursueth profit and desire by unrighteous means, is soon destroyed by his senses. He that speaketh profit and desire, should yet practise virtue at the outset, for neither profit nor desire is (really) dissociated from virtue. O King, it hath been said that virtue alone is the cause of the three, for he that seeketh the three, may by the aid of virtue alone grow like fire when brought into contact with a heap of dry grass»³. The course of the world rests upon virtue, wealth and desire. Amongst these three which is the foremost in point of importance?

«Study of the various scriptures, asceticism, gift-faith, performance of sacrifices, forgiveness, sincerity of disposition, compassion, truth, self-restraint, these constitute possessions of virtue... Both virtue and profit have their roots in these. I think that all these are capable of being included in one term. It is by virtue that ṛṣis have crossed (the world with all its difficulties). It is upon virtue that all the worlds depend (for their existence). It is by virtue that the gods attained to their position of superiority. It is upon virtue that profit or wealth rests. Virtue is foremost in point of merit. Profit is said to be middling. Desire, it is said by the wise, is the lowest of the three. For this reason one should live with restrained soul, giving his attention to virtue most. One should also behave towards all creatures as he should towards himself»⁴.

The individual human being, besides the spirit, is composed of a

3. The *Mahābhārata* 6.124.34-40.

4. *Ibidem* 12.167.8 ff.

gross body and a subtle body. The first is made of five gross elements (earth, fire, water, air and ether). The second is constituted by the five senses of knowledge, the five senses of action, the five objects of the senses, the mind, the ego, and the intellect. The individual lives in a society of many individuals and has his rights and duties. Constituted as a human being by both the earthly and the divine element of body and spirit, he cherishes four main ends of life (*Puruṣārtha*); namely, pleasure, wealth, virtue and liberation. The individual, being associated with a body with which he is seemingly identified, desires such objects that are congenial and pleasing to him. The attainment and enjoyment of desirable objects thus becomes one of the ends of human life. But the enjoyment of pleasurable objects in the complex social structure depends on the acquisition of property and wealth, of power and position in social life. Thus the wealth becomes the second end of human life. Now both the possession and enjoyment of wealth are made possible for the individual in a stable social order which imposes certain laws of good conduct and social behaviour on its members. Hence the individual has to follow the moral virtue in his conduct. Thus virtue becomes the third end of man. But the individual cannot be content with the attainment of these three ends of life; for he seeks the final and eternal end, which is the highest good for him. This he finds in the liberation from all sin and suffering, and recognizes it as the *summum bonum* of human life.

Accepting the three motives of wealth, pleasure and virtue, as the incentives for all the worldly activities, the *Mahābhārata* emphasizes that these motives should be so guided that they may lead to the ultimate realization of the inner spirituality, the ultimate aim of human life⁵.

The whole essence of the *Mahābhārata* is said to consist in upholding this principle. «With raised hands I proclaim that wealth and pleasure are for the sake of virtue (*dharma*), then why not follow *dharma*? But alas! nobody listens to me»⁶.

Generally the Indian thought conceived of *kāma* as subsidiary and subservient to *artha* which has to be manifested as subsidiary and

5. *Ibidem* 12.123; 161.5-9.

6. *Bhārata Sāvitrī*.

subservient to *dharma*. All are subordinate to *mokṣa*, the ultimate spiritual liberation. In the different periods of Indian history, *dharma* and not *mokṣa*, became the most important ideal and was considered as supreme. The relation of these four ends of human life to each other is explained by Manu as follows:

«Let him avoid (the acquisition of) wealth and (the gratification of his) desires, if they are opposed to *dharma*, and avoid also those acts of *dharma* which are opposed to and hurt the feelings of the general public, and lead not to joy, even in the future»⁷.

And *dharma* is the means of attaining *mokṣa*. For only by performing one's work does one attain spiritual insight and liberation, not by running away from it. The performing of *dharma* is the cause of one's happiness. The fulfilment of *dharma* brings happiness as fruit; namely, health, wealth, pleasure, happiness, and bliss. *Dharma* becomes fruitless and worthless if it is considered subservient to worldly objects. «He shall not fulfil his sacred duties merely in order to acquire the worldly objects (as fame, gain and honour). For when they ought to bring rewards, (duties thus fulfilled) become fruitless»⁸.

In the analysis of *dharma* there are two aspects which appear opposed to each other. Thus we distinguish these two aspects thus: the ethical, the religious, the mystical and the ideal aspects of *dharma*; economic, political, racial, professional, etc. aspects of *dharma*. According to the Hindu vision, the first aspect was prevalent in the Golden Age (Kṛta-yuga in the beginning). Though it was highly efficient in its social implications, it was mystically or intuitively realised. The second aspect was known and experienced when its mental realization came about.

Now let us analyse the teaching of the *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* on the *trivarga*.

2. *Kāma*: the pursuit of pleasure

Kāma in the narrow sense means sexual pleasure; but in its broad sense it signifies all the pleasures of the pleasures of the senses.

7. Manu 1.176.

8. Āpastamba 1.7.20.1-2.

Pleasure-seeking is not denounced by Hindu thinkers in any way; rather they considered it as a necessary element in human life and experience and declared it as one of the aims of human life. «A man should enjoy all such pleasures as are not opposed to *dharma*. In this way one secures both the worlds»⁹. Vālmīki gives *kāma* the lowest position. Pleasure must be subordinate to *dharma* and *artha*. He says:

«*Kāma* is an irresistible force. A person highly indulgent fails to understand what is good, what is proper time and proper place for any action»¹⁰.

Again, he makes it clear that *kāma* should be subject to *dharma* and *artha*.

«He who renouncing *dharma* and *artha* follows *kāma* (lust), speedily gets himself involved in troubles like Daśaratha»¹¹.

For *kāma* deprived of *artha* and *dharma* is mere lust and therefore a vice. Lust disturbs the social and moral order of the society by giving rise to immoral and anti-social practices. For Vālmīki, *kāma* is subservient not only to *artha* but also to *dharma*. He asserts:

«He who renouncing *dharma* and *artha* devotes himself to *kāma* wholly is like a man who has fallen asleep on the top of a tree and wakes when he has fallen down»¹².

3. *Artha: the pursuit of wealth*

Vālmīki defines *artha* as follows:

«The object which a person desirous of acquiring wealth follows without any discretion in his action is the true definition of wealth given by political economists»¹³.

9. *Ibidem* 2.8.20.

10. *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa* 33.55:

*Tathāviśahyam balam naraśreṣṭhāśarīra jasya /
Na deśakālau hi yathārtha dharmāvavekṣate /
Kāmaratir manuṣyaḥ //*

11. *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* 53.13:

*Arthadharmau parityajya yah kāmam anuvartate /
Evam āpadyate kṣipram rājā Daśaratho yathā //*

12. *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa* 38.21-22:

*Hitvā dharmam tathārtham ca kāmam yastu niṣevate /
Sa vrkṣāgre yathā suptaḥ patitaḥ pratibudhyate //*

13. *Āraṇya Kāṇḍa* 43.34:

Those who are intent upon acquiring wealth hardly care for the means they adopt. *Artha* is an important means for *dharma* itself. Like *kāma*, *artha* has also an instrumental value; it is a means of securing a good human life and its development. But the misuse of *artha* leads to social ills.

Lakṣmaṇa condemns *dharma*, the spiritual good of human life, and exalts *artha* as the only fit object of human endeavour:

«Profitless *dharma* is incapable of delivering you from calamities. Beings mobile and immobile can be perceived, but *dharma* cannot be perceived. Therefore I think it does not exist. Just as immobile objects are visible so are the mobile; but this fruit of *dharma* is not perceived; (otherwise) one like you should not run into peril»¹⁴.

One is struck much by the strong denunciation of the *dharma* ideal by Lakṣmaṇa. In a grave context, when Indrajit had brought the counterfeit figure of Sītā and killed her before Hanumat and Hanumat had rushed up to Rāma's presence and reported this tragedy, Rāma lost heart. He fell into a swoon and was unable to control his feelings. He said: «Let us beat a retreat. All is over. What is there to do here any more?». On this occasion, strange to say, Lakṣmaṇa spoke: «Didn't I tell you before when we started this misery, when you surrendered the kingdom at the instance of Kaikeyi; didn't I tell you that *dharma* was futile? There you are. See what you have come to now. Faithfully following the doctrine of *dharma*, obeying your father, you have been landed in this trouble». This is a clear antipathy of his to the doctrine of *dharma*. Then he contrasts *dharma* with *artha*. He commends: «*Artha* is the thing to work for, worldly gains, advantages, things which are ours. You ought to be after these. You have done wrong. You pursued the wrong course and landed yourself in terrible misery»¹⁵.

Arthī yenārthakṛtyena samvrajaty avicārayan /
Tam artham arthaśāstragnyaḥ prāhurarthiyāḥ sulakṣmaṇa //
 14. *Yuddha Kāṇḍa* 83.14-16:
Anarthebhyo na śaknoti trātuṃ dharmo nirarthakaḥ /
Bhūtānāṃ sthāvarāṇāṃ ca jangamānāṃ ca darśanam /
Yathāsti na tathā dharmastena nāstīti me matiḥ //
Yathaiva sthāvarāṃ vyaktāṃ jangamaṃ ca tathāvidham /
Nāyam arthastathā yuktas tv advidho na vipadyate //
 15. See also *Yuddha Kāṇḍa* 83.14,35-36,41.

Here perhaps Vālmīki intends to portray the contrast between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, how Rāma in the midst of the direct calamities could not be made to deviate even in a small way from the highest duty of all as he saw it, and how Lakṣmaṇa could not rise to the height of *dharma*. Or perhaps we have to conclude that Vālmīki, through Lakṣmaṇa, tries to inculcate the practically realistic point of view of life. Lakṣmaṇa praised the moral and social values but disliked the ascetical and over-spiritual values which are not conducive to the development of human personality. Though he does not think that wealth is everything, yet he holds that without wealth other values might be in peril.

4. *Dharma: the pursuit of virtue*

We come to the third and the most important object of human goal. Vālmīki rejects an unreflective or blind following of *dharma* and stresses the spirit of the law. He makes Rāma say:

«I am not introducing some such righteousness unfavourable unto thee, that has never been practised before. I am simply treading that path that had been approved and followed by the predecessors»¹⁶.

Vālmīki clearly warns against externalism or mechanical observance of what has been done before by elders; morality requires one to act with reflection. For he says:

«Highly intelligent people are capable of discriminating what is good and what is evil by their intellect» (*Āraṇyakāṇḍa* 66.6). «*Dharma* of the good is subtle and is very difficult to understand by an ordinary person. Yet it is within the heart of every person. It is the soul of all beings which discerns the good and evil»¹⁷.

Dharma resides in our heart in the sense that it is the voice of conscience that should guide a person in moral situation. The fixed, unalterable *dharma* says that the commands of the gurus, father and

16. *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* 21.36:

*Nāhaṁ dharmam apūrvam te pratikūlaṁ pravartaye /
Pūrvairayaṁ abhipreto gato mārgo'nugamyate //*

17. *Kiṣkindha Kāṇḍa* 18.15-16:

*Sukṣmaḥ param avijñeyaḥ satām dharmāḥ plavaṅgama /
Hṛdisthaḥ sarvabhūtānām ātmā veda śubhāśubham //*

king must be obeyed even if they arise out of passion, anger or desire or love. But Vālmīki does not approve this:

«Will you carry out father's commands based on unrighteousness and censured? Oh virtuous brother, do you not know that there are some people who practise *dharma* only to deceive others?»¹⁸.

All this shows that the inner voice of man and the intelligence of a person must discern what is good or bad.

5. The relation between the three ends

The three ends are not contradictory in themselves but can be followed by the same person together. To illustrate the harmony between these three ends Vālmīki gives the example of a woman in whom obedience, charm and possession of a son are combined in spite of their differences.

«*Dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* are looked upon with great esteem in this world of the created, but when the occasion for obtaining fruits consequent upon the virtuous deeds of a prior life appears, all these three undoubtedly are fulfilled in righteousness like a wife who is obedient, charming and having a son. It is not becoming for us to perform all these things where these three do not combine; one should resort to that which may lead one to *dharma*. A man seeking wealth is hated in the world, and one given to *kāma* is not praised either»¹⁹.

Kāma and *artha* without *dharma* are looked down upon, but not *dharma* without *kāma* and *artha*. A man who seeks *artha* alone devoid of *dharma* or *kāma* hates others and is hated by others in turn. A man who goes after lust devoid of *dharma* suffers from infamy and is not admired by any. Any two of the ends are to be preferred to the

18. *Āraṇya Kāṇḍa* 23.12:

Kariṣyasi pitūr vākyam adharmiṣṭhaṁ vigarhitam /

23.8:

Santi dharmopadhāsakta dharmātmam kiṁ na bhudhyase.

19. *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* 21.57-58:

Dharmārthakāmāḥ khalu jīvaloke samīkṣitā dharmaphalodayeṣu /

Ye tatra sarve syur saṁśayaṁ me bhāryeva vaśyābhimatā saputrā //

yasmiṁs tu sarve syur asannivīṣṭā dharmo yataḥ syāt tad upakrameta /

Dveṣyo bhavaty arthaparo hi loke kāmātmatā khalvati na praśastā //

remaining third, provided *dharma* is one of this pair²⁰. *Dharma* which is the good is the ultimate end of human life according to Vālmiki. But this *dharma* must be present in *kāma* and *artha* if they are to become the good of human life in the good sense. «Place, time, means, faith, and deserving man are the conditions of *dharma*»²¹. For Vālmiki *dharma* is a relative principle which expresses itself in a particular way in particular moral situations.

6. The supreme value of *dharma*

According to Vālmiki *dharma* is the supreme goal of human life and is an end in itself. And truth itself is established in *dharma*²². Truth (*satya*) is interchangeable with *dharma*. «Those who know *dharma*, call truth as the real *dharma* of life. *Satya* alone is absolute *Brahman* and *dharma* is established in truth. *Satya* is immortal Vedas, through *satya* a man can realize his ultimate goal. Follow *satya* if your mind is fixed in *dharma*»²³. *Dharma* is the prime object of life, identified with *Brahman*, with the immortal Vedas. As we see, *dharma* is not considered by Vālmiki only as a means but an end in itself. A good moral life is the goal of the individual and wishing well of all human beings (*sarve bhūta hite ratih*) is the social ideal.

It is to be noted that *mokṣa* or *mukti* in the strict sense of liberation from rebirth and transmigration is not found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki. It is found only in the later *Upaniṣads*. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* we find four kinds of *mukti* (release, from death and the ravages of time; the fourth is ascent to the “heavenly

20. *Yuddha Kāṇḍa* 63.9.

21. *Kiṣkindha Kāṇḍa* 40.18:

Deśāṅkālau pāyena dravyaṃ śraddhā samanvitam

Pātre pradiyate yena sakalam dharma lakṣaṇam.

22. *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* 21.41:

Dharmo hi paramo loke dharme satyaṃ pratiṣṭhitam.

23. *Ibidem* 14.3:

Āhuḥ satyaṃ hi paramaṃ dharmam dharmavido janāḥ.

Ibidem 14.7-9:

Satyam ekapadaṃ Brahma satye dharmam pratiṣṭhitam

Satyam evākṣayāvedās satyenāvāpyate param

satyam samanuvartasva yadi dharme dhṛtā matiḥ.

world" followed by the four attainments. All these are won by the mystic knowledge of identification between ritual, cosmic and human entities (3.1.5.). This is not the later *mukti* (release) from rebirth. Perhaps the earliest mention of *mukti* in the strict sense of release from rebirth is found in the same *Upaniṣad* (4.4.8-10). The idea that the one who pursues the *mokṣa* must renounce the three ends of human life such as *kāma*, *artha* and *dharma*, and *vice versa*. This shows that the fourth end of liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa*) is totally on a different plane. It is a common belief that with the appearance of *mokṣa* ideal in Hindu religious thought, the ideal of *dharma* is left to the realm of morality and *mokṣa* is raised to the level of spirituality and mysticism. In the *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* the term *mokṣa* never appears. The idea of rebirth is present in its very ordinary sense without any philosophical elaboration. Some references to the idea of *saṁsāra* may be due to later interpolation.

Conclusion

According to *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* there are three ends of human life: *kāma*, *artha*, and *dharma*. *Kāma* and *artha* are subordinate to *dharma*. Rāma sacrifices them for *dharma*. He pursues the three ends in their relative importance. *Dharma* gives value to *kāma* and *artha*. One who pursues *kāma*, *artha* and *dharma* in time acquires right understanding. *Dharma* is the only intrinsic value. It can be attained by self-restraint. Pursuit of *kāma* alone can never lead to *dharma* crowned with felicity. *Dharma* and *artha* produce prosperity and happiness in heaven and on earth. But vice (*adharma*) produces evil and harm. *Dharma* is the supreme way and the supreme goal of man. *Dharma* is the course of high-souled person. Good conduct of virtuous persons is the criterion of righteousness and wrongness. Reason, subordinate to the Vedas, determines right and wrong after due consideration. What is conducive to the welfare of all beings is the supreme virtue and duty of all. There is no *dharma* that does not contain truth. Rāma is established in virtue and truth.

Rāmāyaṇa stresses the purity of mind. Even a desire to steal without any overt action is a sin. Even lusting after another's wife in the mind is a sin. The mind directs the senses to their functions. If the

mind is righteously disposed, the senses do not go astray. The ethics of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is anti-hedonistic and ascetical in tendency. Evil springs from desire. Pursuit of *kāma* alone can never lead to *dharma*. True happiness comes from *dharma*. Asceticism produces righteousness and happiness. It consists in renunciation of pleasures. In brief, *Rāmāyaṇa* preaches the subjective morality of purity of mind and self-control, and the objective social morality of the pursuit of common good of humanity. It lays great emphasis on truthfulness, non-injury, benevolence, self-control, and devotion to human welfare.